

A Brief History of the NCLC  
(A Story of Human Failure and God's Mercy)

David Koenig

Initial Contact In the early 1970s Oscar Erpenstein of St. Stephen's of San Francisco came into contact with certain Nigerian students schooling in the USA. He showed them the truth from God's Word. When they returned to Nigeria, contact did not stop with these students of the Word. Oscar continued to correspond with them and their friends in Nigeria on the basic teachings of Christianity. From this correspondence a request came from Nigeria to come over and teach us.

January 1974 - In answer to this request, which was forwarded to the CLC Board of Missions, a visitation team of Pastors C. Thurow and N. Reim traveled to Nigeria and visited the churches and individuals who voiced interest in the CLC through Oscar. It was determined by this visitation that here was a mission field in which we should work. Very near the outset of our relationship with these churches, they numbered around 2500 souls in 44 congregations. It appeared that there was much work to do to train these people in the pure Word.

April 1974 - Pastor Essien and several stations he served addressed a letter to the CLC inquiring of affiliation. Pastor Essien had been trained at the old Synodical Conference school at Obot Idim. It seemed this would be a real doctrinal boost to the group now calling itself the Nigerian Church of the Lutheran Confession. None of the preachers or pastors who now made up the NCLC was trained Lutheran, and only one congregation had been Lutheran previously (Synodical Conference).

Late 1974 - Patrick Udo with his wife and child arrived in the USA to begin his studies at Immanuel Lutheran College to prepare for the ministry. He had been chosen by the visitation team to come to the USA for training. At this time also it appeared difficult to get a missionary into Nigeria from our CLC, although investigation began as to the possibility.

September 1977 The NCLC had applied for a government registration number. This was a prerequisite to eventually apply for overseas missionaries. After much work and time on the part of NCLC members, the church was incorporated and registered with the Federal Government.

March 1980 - Recognizing that correspondence was not doing the job of keeping in touch with our sister church, a visitation team of Pastors E. Albrecht and P.F. Nolting visited the churches and held discussions with the leaders. The number of congregations had declined to 27. There were serious internal problems in the church. After assessing the report, the convention of the CLC that year reaffirmed its desire to continue the work there and to have a missionary on the scene. The visitation team stressed the importance of establishing a school for the preachers with two of our men staffing it. If this were not done, there could be little hope of an orthodox church there in fellowship with us.

January 1984 - The situation within the church was not improving due to several factors, one of which was that no resident missionary was present. A visitation team of Pastors N. Reim and D. Koenig visited the remaining congregations and held discussions with the leaders. A split within the NCLC was manifest, both before and after the visitation. (This finally culminated in a separation between the two groups after the resident missionary arrived.) The convention of that year, as always, affirmed the importance of a missionary. The CLC Board of Missions deemed that the India mission field in Andhra Pradesh state was a better field to enter and a missionary was to be called there. He would make periodic trips to Nigeria.

January 1985 - Calling a missionary to India began. As developments proceeded that year, Pastor D. Koenig accepted the call. When it appeared that we would not be able to get the missionary into India, the Board of Missions decided to send the missionary to Nigeria instead.

September 1986 - The CLC's first resident missionary arrived in Nigeria to take up the work. Pastor D. Koenig, his wife, and five children located at Efa Anyam, Etinan, Cross River State. The congregations and preaching stations numbering 12 were visited. Meeting after meeting was held concerning the split. In early 1987 the Ibeno group clearly were not with the NCLC anymore. Meetings were held with P. Udo to determine his sincerity in serving in the NCLC.

January 1987 - Classes at the Lutheran Bible Institute began. This school was set up to train pastors for the ministry in the NCLC. Pastors Essien and Koenig taught with the help of Mr. P. Udo. It was to have one year of preparatory studies followed by a three-year course of a modified seminary program. Of the 12 students who began, eight completed the year's studies and were passed into the three-year program. During this year, two new preaching stations were started. Students went to serve these as well as the other stations on weekends.

Easter 1987 - It was determined that P. Udo was sincere in his desire to serve the Lord in the NCLC ministry. The NCLC Board authorized his ordination, which took place at Nya.

January 1988 - The Bible Institute began its second year of operation with three students in the first year (One completed the course and was passed into the next year.) and with eight students in the second year. During this year two new preaching stations were started.

December 1988 - In February of this year the government notified the Institute that it must be approved by said state government. In December the state government gave notice of its approval.

January 1989 - Ever since the arrival of the resident missionary, the work with the government was going on to obtain a church missionary quota number. Without this number, no foreign missionary could work with the NCLC. The missionary could be required to leave Nigeria at any time. Finally, all necessary papers were completed and forwarded to the Federal Capitol at Abuja. Now we await the government's assigning of the number. We await this with prayer. Once the number is given, then the missionary may apply for residency. It is then also that work on a second missionary may be begun in earnest.

June 1989 - The two evangelists who have served with Pastor Essien for 14 years and completed part of the Institute program were ordained.

February 1989 - A visitation was carried out by Pastor Norbert Reim, who served for fifteen years in Nigeria, and Mr. Lee Krueger. At the conclusion of this year we could look back and praise God that the Missionary/Expatriate Quota Number was granted by the Nigerian government and that resident status was gained by the missionary.

November 1990 - Pastor Koenig left the field having resigned for personal reasons.

January 1991 - Pastor Paul Gurgel, his wife and three children arrived on the field having accepted the call. Pastor Gurgel served for two terms, having been called once and then again by the Mission Board. During his service the Bible Institute graduated the first class to go the five years. Several men also graduated in the succeeding years. A children's home was started. A fifty year lease was signed for a parcel of ground on which to erect a Bible institute. Business operations for the students were attempted of farming and cassava grinding. Kinship began supporting the children's home in 1998.

December 1996 - Pastor Gurgel ended his term of service. The Mission Board decided to try to have the mission operate without a missionary present.

July 1997 - A visitation was carried out by seminarian Todd Ohlmann and Pastor Koenig. They recommended to the Board that a resident missionary be called again.

November 1997 - Pastor Koenig accepted the call to Nigeria, with time also to be spent in India each year.

February 1998 - A preliminary visit was made by Pastor Koenig to the field to prepare to move there. After much Nigerian government red tape was cleared away by the Lord in His own good time Pastor and Mrs. Koenig arrived to take up residency. Resident status was applied for and granted. The year 1999 saw: outreach started in Badagry, Port Harcourt, and preliminary work done in Lagos, the Bible Institute enrollment increase (1998 - 3, 1999 - 6, 2000 - 13).

increased discipline and instruction carried out among the brethren.

October 1999 - A foundation laying ceremony was carried out at Badagry. Work also began with volunteer labor at the new site for the Bible Institute with the beginning of a student housing building.

February 2000 - A visitation was carried out by Pastor Naumann, chairman of the Mission Board, and Jack Mayhew. The Mission Board members were able to participate in the ordination ceremony and celebration for the graduate Sunday Aaron.

Statistics - NCLC - 868 souls, 10 pastors, 1 evangelist, 6 institute students (1997), 12 students (2000)

Congregations and Preaching Stations - The first number is membership and the second number is recent attendance.

Efa - 408,121, Ikot Obio - 28,21, Mbukpo Oduobo - 84,48, Mbukpo Ukokai - 28,28, Ikot Ntan - 9,15, Oyubia - 14,14, Afaha Efiat - 22,15, Afaha Akpan - 16,7, Ikot Eba - 28,22, Nkana - 138,79, Nya - 54,46, Iton - 13,19, Ikot Inyang - 26,10, Port Harcourt - 10, Lagos and Badagry not organized yet